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TWENTY QUESTIONS on FLOWERS IN CHURCH

By IRENE CAUDWELL

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ON
FLOWERS IN CHURCH

ANSWERED BY

IRENE CAUDWELL

Author of 'Ceremonies of Holy Church,' etc.

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QUESTIONS ANSWERED

1. How should flowers be treated to preserve them?
2. What colours and backgrounds are suitable?
3. What general pitfalls should be avoided?
4. What sort of vases and containers should be used?
5. Do any flowers call for special treatment?
6. May any other decorations but cut flowers be used?
7. How should altar flowers be arranged?
8. What decorations are suitable for the chancel screen and wall?
9. How should the aumbry and the lectern be decorated?
10. What style of decoration should be used for the pulpit and for shrines?
11. How should the font be decorated?
12. What decorations are suitable for Christmas?
13. Should the Christmas Crib have any floral decorations and how are evergreen wreaths made?

14. May flowers be used in Lent and Advent?
15. Are any flowers used on Palm Sunday?
16. What are the Maundy Chapel, the Easter Sepulchre, and the Easter Garden?
17. How should the church be decorated for Easter?
18. How should the church be decorated for Harvest?
19. Do any other Festivals call for special treatment?
20. Should the decorators be organized?

1. *How should flowers be treated to preserve them?*

Constant attention—removing dead leaves and blossoms—giving plenty of water so that it circulates round the stems, changed every other day. No vase should be stuffed tightly, as the flowers are unable to breathe. Flowers placed near a radiator or other heating apparatus will fade quickly. Beware when arranging mixed flowers in a bowl or vase that no one among them has so strong an odour that it causes murder among the others. Chrysanthemums are sinners in this respect and so are many evergreens and ivy.

Flowers with woody stems, such as lilac and flowering shrubs, should have the stems hammered for two or three inches from the end, and scraped on the outside. All blossoms and greenery should have a slight bit of the stem cut off under water and slightly split up, where the stem is not too fine.

Cape gooseberries should be cut in autumn, when fully red, tied and hung upside down in dry place ready for use when leaves are ready to strip off easily. Statice should have same treatment. Neither should be put into water.

2. *What colours and backgrounds are suitable?*

Any colours, except where special ones are customary for festivals. If only two or three colours are used care must be taken that they blend perfectly. If many tints are available they can be mixed in a riot of colour as in a garden. For altar vases one or two varieties should be sufficient. The use of two varieties only for the whole church can be effective for a festival. All flowers require greenery to display them—a blossom's own foliage being appropriate, but not always sufficient.

The background of floral decorations should be carefully studied. Light backgrounds require dark flowers and *vice versa*. Where flowers stand with a large space around them they should be arranged on the grand scale; a limited space requiring a smaller decoration.

It should be remembered that the lighting of the church may throw deep shadows on some of the flowers at night and arrangements should be made accordingly. Floodlighting can be used to bring out unexpected beauty. A background of greenery with flowers in front as though growing against a hedge can sometimes be used.

3. *What general pitfalls should be avoided?*

No decoration should obstruct priest, servers, choir, or congregation, or be liable to catch in garments. No faded, or even fading, flower should remain. It is less irreverent to have none at all. No leaves below water's edge, except tulip-daffodil family. Wood or stonework should be protected from damp of pots or vases by cork, linoleum, or rubber mats.

In Children's Corners the flowers are apt to become neglected. So although the children themselves are allowed to arrange the flowers they should be *unobtrusively* supervised by an adult. No nails or drawing pins in woodwork or plaster, only a few *permanent* screw-eyes painted to tone with surroundings and prevent rust.

Constant changes—not always daffodil cross on pulpit at Easter, holly wreath at Christmas, grapes at Harvest!

To clean soiled vases—brass, copper, pewter, metal polish; lacquer, soft duster only, occasional few drops sweet oil; aluminium, plain hot water; silver, Lux, very hot water; glass and pottery, Lux, warm water, plenty of dry towels; stained glass, leave forty-eight hours filled finely-shredded newspaper and water, rinse well.

4. *What sort of vases and containers should be used?*

Glass is always safe. Pottery is suitable, provided it tones with its surroundings, is of simple, dignified shape, and is not over-elaborate or decorated with pictorial designs. Brass, silver, copper, or pewter can be used, provided it agrees with other metal in its vicinity; never a brass cross and candlesticks with silver vases!

Beware of porous containers unless set upon very thick, damp-resisting mats. Vases can be arranged at different levels, but not on ledges evenly set above one another, as this gives impression of a greenhouse or florist's shop.

For short-stemmed flowers where bowls with glass or wire 'middles' are unsuitable, paper can be stuffed at the bottom of vases to give greater height to the blossoms, provided vase is non-transparent. If transparent use moss. Large glazed brown kitchen mixing-bowls are useful, also plain red earthenware. This can be treated with 'Snowcem' to make it creamy-white to tone with stonework.

All vases should be unobtrusive; the flowers are of importance, not their containers. All containers should be kept scrupulously clean, have firm bases, and hold sufficient water. Bowls or troughs can have wire-mesh tops or floating wooden boards pierced with holes.

5. *Do any flowers call for special treatment?*

Pot flowers should be watered by being immersed for ten minutes in water just over the rim of the pot. In cold weather use tepid water.

Floral decorations should always appear natural, as if growing. Each flower should be put separately into its container to preserve an artistic balance, with the possible exception of bunches of small flowers, such as violets or snowdrops. Tulips emit a slight 'squeak' from their leaves when fresh. A penny in the water prevents them from flopping. Large boughs of syringa, pyracanthus and flowering trees wither quickly. Their stems should be scraped for several inches and well hammered. Small sprigs broken off will last longer. Gypsophila, forget-me-nots, and golden rod are very thirsty. They and lilies require constant changes of water to prevent bad odour.

When moving a vase of such flowers as delphiniums, syringa, phlox, or grasses, place on a tray or newspaper to prevent trail of petals on the floor. Fluffy pampas grass should be politely refused, also flowering privet, which is a potential source of hay fever. The dainty white blossoms of the star of Bethlehem emit a powerful odour of garlic. Mimosa and heavily-scented lilies can be overpowering in a small building.

6. *May any other decorations but cut flowers be used?*

Foliage of every description can be utilized, whether wearing its green dress or the vivid tints of autumn. All products of the hedgerow, the garden, the orchard, and the downland, including such varieties as berries, catkins, teazels, rushes, clematis, poppyheads, and honesty, in their natural tints, or dyed, as well as grasses of every description. A new art is also arising of preserving flowers in their natural colours.

Bare branches of trees dipped in gold, silver, or coloured lacquer or paint are extremely effective, especially in winter time, either alone, or mingled with evergreens. The great bowls on either side of the chancel steps in Canterbury Cathedral show how even the foliage of vegetables, as well as vegetables and fruits themselves can be used in a highly artistic and decorative manner, with or without the accompaniment of flowers.

Artificial flowers are the only variety of floral decoration which must never be allowed in God's House, whether formed of paper, wax, plasticine, or any other manufactured material.

7. *How should altar flowers be arranged?*

A large bowl or deep jar may stand on the top step of the altar on the north side, preferably on a stand. Alternatively, a small shrub or tree can stand on the ground on either side of the altar. Although, strictly speaking, no flowers should appear on the altar itself, yet an altar which has no riddels (side curtains) often has a vase on either side of the cross, instead of the one on the step. These vases should be in proportion with the altar ornaments, the flowers being large enough to be distinguished at a distance and not appear a blur of tightly-packed blossom.

Pot flowers should never appear upon the altar. No spray or blossom should lean forward to touch the priest's face or uplifted arms. It should be remembered that some priests feel faint in the presence of heavily scented flowers. The position of the candles should be noted, so that no foliage or flower can be singed or burnt, neither should any touch the fabric of the reredos. Flower pollen and spores from ferns should be watched to avoid stains or damage from damp.

8. *What decorations are suitable for the chancel screen and wall?*

The screen, if heavy, should be left undecorated. Otherwise it can be wreathed with thin ropes of evergreen at Christmas, corn at Harvest, ivy on other occasions. Small tin holders, treated some weeks before use with several coats of paint, can be tied to the framework, filled with flowers and greenery, completely hiding the container, which, after use, should be entirely free from moisture before being stored in a dry place.

The chancel wall can be utilized for flowers arranged in vases of clear glass or of earthenware toning with the surrounding stone or woodwork. If there is a Rood on the screen it should be left undecorated. A laurel wreath or circlet of flowers may appear at the foot of the Cross or on the top-most shaft above the Redeemer's thorn-crowned head.

Where there is no screen and the wall is sufficiently wide for floral decoration this should be kept sufficiently low not to hide the altar, the tallest flowers being used to the extreme north and south. Pot and cut flowers with foliage can fill the space from the top of the wall to the floor.

9. *How should the aumbry and the lectern be decorated?*

No flowers should touch the aumbry, but they may be arranged on either side, or below it; in the latter case the use of a small table or stool is permissible. Any colour may be used, although white, gold, and pastel shades are the most frequent choice. Flowers may be used throughout the year, even during Advent and Lent, with one exception, that being the hours when the aumbry is empty, from after the Maundy Thursday Eucharist until the first Eucharist of Easter.

The lectern may be decorated with vases of varying heights placed around the front, tall branches and blossoms being used for the background, although not sufficiently high to hide the face of the reader, or be so placed as to catch his surplice.

Any fussy decoration should be avoided. A balustrade may be wreathed with any soft greenery which has no prickles. A string of holly berries hanging from the eagle's beak is effective at Christmas. A hanging wreath or cross can be made on a florist's moss-covered frame, or a birchbark cross with floral spray can be used.

10. *What style of decoration should be used for the pulpit and for shrines?*

Nothing that can catch in the preacher's surplice, prick his hands, or be knocked over, so the top ledge should be left bare. As the enormity of knocking nails into church fabric or furniture should never be practised, a few screw eyes may be permanently fixed inside the pulpit from which thin string or wire can be attached to wreaths, crosses, or garlands.

Ropes of greenery can be wreathed about the pulpit or twined round the balustrade. Any shelf can have vases placed upon it, held in position by a strong wire bound right round the pulpit, fastened at each end to two of the permanent screw eyes inside. The base may be decorated with cut or pot flowers.

Any statues on the pulpit, if not too small, may be decorated with a crown of flowers or greenery, or sprays stuck round them like an aureole. Space permitting, flowers may be placed at their feet, as though they were walking through a garden. Figures in shrines may receive the same treatment, together with arrangements of cut or pot flowers. A palm branch may be placed in the hand of a martyr. Garlands were thrown around statues in ancient England. Banners used in a procession may be garlanded.

11. *How should the font be decorated?*

The handle of the cover may be bound with ivy or other greenery. A single vase or bowl which can easily be moved for Baptisms may stand upon the cover. Another treatment is that of an upstanding floral cross placed on the cover, or suspended from the canopy or ceiling, being formed of two flat crosses, exactly alike, and fastened back to back.

Two children's wooden hoops, inserted at right angles to one another, with a third round their centre to hold them together, can be decorated and suspended over the font, both this or the cross being sufficiently high for neither it nor its decorations to touch the priest's head when he is administering Holy Baptism.

A lightly-festooned garland of ivy or other suitable greenery may be fastened round the body of the font; vases or pot flowers may stand at its base, sufficiently secure on their base not to inconvenience the godparents. Nothing should be placed on the ledge of the font. During the decoration the stopper should be rigidly kept in place so that no leaves or petals stop up the drain.

12. *What decorations are suitable for Christmas?*

Evergreens of every description, especially holly arranged in vases, in ropes, or wreaths, in which scarlet ribbon may be threaded. Gold or white flowers, scarlet poinsettias, Cape gooseberries, white statice; lilies at altar if procurable. Christmas trees, decorated with coloured electric lights and glittering balls and ornaments, standing in tubs painted sombre colour, or wrapped round with dark green or brown paper. A sheaf of corn over church door outside for birds.

Where there is no rood screen a rope of evergreens or plaited ivy can be suspended from middle of chancel arch to extreme ends of chancel walls, forming an inverted V.

For Epiphany a wooden hoop symbolizing the Star, can be decorated with candles and suspended from middle of chancel roof, or white statice sewn on to a star-shaped cardboard foundation; two stars being made, fastened back to back. Evergreens may remain in position until octave of Epiphany (January 13th), flowers during that period being removed or replaced if faded.

Where possible, evergreens should be placed in water to lengthen their life, but never holly, or the leaves will drop off. Many flowers will not live long in the same vase as evergreens.

13. *Should the Christmas Crib have any floral decorations and how are evergreen wreaths made?*

Evergreens, holly and flowers may surround the Crib; Christmas roses, violets, white, gold, or pastel-tinted flowers with short stems may appear as if growing in the straw, the latter arranged entirely to hide their containers. Ivy may climb over the roof, moss can be laid on the ground around with flowers springing from it. The Crib should stand on a table or small platform, never directly on the floor. Tall candles can be placed on either side, also a fir tree, with or without glittering balls, on one or either side, care being taken that no candles or lighting can set anything on fire, a not altogether unusual calamity! No flower or greenery showing the slightest sign of decay should remain.

Evergreen wreaths are made with lengths of clothes line stretched three feet from the ground, each end fastened firmly to a strong support, leaving sufficient to tie. The worker is seated with basket of prepared evergreens and bunches of holly berries. A few sprigs are tied firmly at one end of rope with fine twine, succeeding bunches being four to five inches apart, hiding the stalks of previous ones. Flowers, if added, should have the ends of their stalks tied in wet moss. Any woodwork or stone the moss is likely to touch should be protected.

14. *May flowers be used in Lent and Advent?*

None in Lent, except at aumbry, with two exceptions:

(*a*) Lady Day (March 25th). White or blue flowers, preferably lilies at the High Altar and in the Lady Chapel, or the latter only.

(*b*) Mothering Sunday (Fourth in Lent). Flowers at the altar and screen. Violets should figure in the scheme. Some churches have Children's Services, in which children are given tiny nosegays to present to their mothers.

Decorations in Advent should be very simple or omitted altogether, except on the Third Sunday, when altar flowers may be used. If flowers are unobtainable, evergreens and foliage only may be used, also varieties mentioned under Question 6. Holly should be kept for Christmas.

Branches of beech leaves will last for months if when first cut they are placed in an earthenware pot to which equal parts of glycerine and water have been added and left to stand, with possibly a later refill. Autumn leaves, dried grasses, blades of wheat, barley, or oats, branches of fir trees without their leaves, bearing fir cones, can be utilized. Grasses or corn should be cut in June or July before they have gone to seed.

15. *Are any flowers used on Palm Sunday?*

A vase or bowl of flowers at the aumbry only, but the churchyard cross may be decorated. For the altars the dried Riviera palms, branches of English palm (the pussy-willow), or sprigs of yew or box, which should not be used with the dried palms. In some districts palm crosses were formerly made from branches of willow, with tufts of catkins at each point, bound with knots and bows of ribbon.

Branches of palm are carried by clergy, servers and choir in the Palm Sunday procession, and two palm crosses are tied on to the processional cross with black or purple ribbon after they have been blessed.

Long branches of palm can be fixed on either side of the opening of the altar rails, fastened in the middle to form a triumphal arch. They can also be arranged upon the altar. All should be removed after Evensong on Palm Sunday.

If it is desired to give 'fluffy' effect to the dried palms each frond can be smoothed out with a blunt paper-knife from stem to point. To preserve them, store in newspaper, stoutly corded, each frond lying flat against the stem.

16. *What are the Maundy Chapel, the Easter Sepulchre, and the Easter Garden?*

The Easter Sepulchre is an altar or other place where the Blessed Sacrament is placed at the Maundy Thursday Eucharist until Mass of the Pre-Sanctified on Good Friday, and is profusely decorated with candles and white and gold flowers. The chapel where the Blessed Sacrament thus rests is sometimes called the Maundy Chapel.

The Easter Garden represents St. Joseph of Arimathea's garden, containing a tomb made of rugged stones, plaster, papier maché, or crumpled brown paper, set in a miniature garden of moss or short turf on a table or small platform protected from damp. It contains flowers, tiny shrubs, and an over-shadowing miniature tree.

For a more ambitious scheme, on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, three crosses on a sand-covered elevation at one side of the garden, a round, flat stone rolled before the entrance to the tomb, no flowers; on Easter Day, flowers in the garden, the stone rolled to one side showing a hidden light in the interior of the tomb, folded grave clothes on a 'stone' shelf, napkin for sacred Head a slight distance away. The simpler scheme should have these same arrange-ments for the Sepulchre. All should be removed after Low Sunday.

17. *How should the church be decorated for Easter?*

In gold and white, 'as a bride adorned for her husband,' lilies being the suitable adornment for the sanctuary, although the arum and Madonna lily should not appear on the same altar. An appeal can be made to worshippers to give one or more lilies in memory of a departed soul, money for them to be sent in not later than Monday in Holy Week. (The list of souls thus remembered can be laid on altar on Easter Day.) A palm or bay tree can stand either side of the altar.

Window-sills may be filled with moss in which flowers appear to grow; the moss being kept sufficiently wet, a tray or thick waterproof substance beneath it to prevent damp touching stone or wood-work. Moss should never be retained for a future occasion.

Mosaic carpets can also be used for window-sills—flowers on moss, short stalks stuck firmly into it, well sprinkled with water, in patterns of Greek key, cross, double triangle or monogram.

The Church should be decorated for the Octave, but not necessarily so lavishly.

18. *How should the church be decorated for Harvest?*

Not like an ecclesiastical greengrocer's shop! For this reason fruit and flowers used together are more decorative than fruit piled together alone. Groceries may be arranged on a table with a box forming a ledge at the back, the whole covered with a cloth and decorated with small-leaved ivy, berries, or flowers.

Vegetables, with a few choice exceptions, are usually better displayed at the west end of the church, or in an alcove, decorated with flowers or greenery, but not on the font. The onion family is best left at home.

Nothing but flowers, with the symbolic offering of a little corn and grapes, should adorn the altar. Bread on the sides of the chancel steps above the reach of mice; grapes and their leaves can be hung on trellis-work against the chancel wall, or tied on the screen; baskets of fruit, eggs, and flowers on either side of chancel steps, or elsewhere, ornamented with berries, ivy, or flowers. Sheaves of corn are improved by ivy, berries, or a band of small, rosy-cheeked apples. Berries, fit for birds' winter larder, should be gathered sparingly.

19. *Do any other Festivals call for special treatment?*

Whitsuntide: any flowers the colour of flame—gold, orange, yellow, red, crimson, rust, pink, blue. Trinity: preferably white or gold, with any of the clover family—clover, sainfoin, shamrock, also pansy. Corpus Christi: all flowers, but especially white and gold, marguerite in particular. Feasts of Our Lady: white lilies, roses, blue and white flowers, snowdrops for Candlemas. St. George: red or white roses. Michaelmas: Michaelmas daisy. All Saints: chrysanthemums, white and coloured. All Souls: All Saints' decorations remain, but not on the altar should there be a Requiem; a churchyard cross can be decorated.

Patronal and Dedication: all flowers. Armistice Sunday: 'Haig's poppies' and laurel. Holy Baptism and Confirmation: white or gold flowers. For Baptism, see also Question 11.

Weddings: all flowers. A flowering tree or bush in a tub on either side of the entrance to the chancel can be used. Greenery or rambler roses can be twined overhead in form of an arch. Funerals: flowers on or around chancel screen only, any colour. When a pall is used, wreaths can be placed below the coffin at head and foot. No artificial flowers, china, or otherwise should be used in the churchyard.

20. *Should the decorators be organized?*

A strictly observed rota of decorators displayed on the church door is valuable, each person being required to take one week, with extra help at festivals. In most parishes, particularly in the towns, a Church Flower Fund with a Treasurer is necessary, the latter being prepared to submit her accounts annually to the parish auditor. The Treasurer should also be kept aware of all proposed gifts of flowers, so that undue expenditure of parish funds may be avoided. Country parishes often provide sufficient from gardens and hedgerows. Flowers cut in the evening or early morning last longer. To keep overnight, remove any bands, put in water up to first blossom.

Each decorator should provide herself with scissors tied to her waist, an old knife, a newspaper or basket for rubbish, and a jug to carry water for her vases, filling these to the brim on each visit. She should be prepared to carry out her work in such a manner that if interrupted for a wedding or service the arrangement looks presentable. She should remain as quiet as possible and begin her work with a silent prayer upon her knees.

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